A CHALLENGE TO NORTH CAROLINA BAPTISTS

An Address by

BASIL M. WATKINS

to the

NORTH CAROLINA BAPTIST STATE CONVENTION

July 30, 1946

Greensboro, N. C.

BX
6332
W37

A CHALLENGE TO NORTH CAROLINA BAPTISTS

Brother President, Messengers to the Convention, Ladies and Gentlemen:

I have listened to the Committee's report and Mr. Broughton's comments with a great deal of interest and genuine pleasure.

Generosity strikes a responsive chord in the human heart. A worthy challenge arouses the courageous to action.

I rejoice in the generous offer made to us by the Trustees of the Smith Reynolds Foundation. I welcome the challenge that is coupled with it.

All of life is a challenge. It availeth nothing to deny it or rebel against it. God made it that way. When the Creator of heaven and earth saw fit as the crowning glory of his handiwork to create man in his own image, he endowed him with the power of freedom of choice; and, from that time until the present day, mankind has been confronted with the necessity of making choices.

Yes, life is a series of challenges. As we are confronted by them, we accept them and grow strong, or we reject them and suffer processes of degeneration. In an effort to deceive ourselves, we may turn

177064

aside from responsibilities and deny that they are personal challenges, but in so doing we make the choice and accelerate inward disintegration.

What a wonderful privilege it is to possess and to exercise the God-given and God-like power of freedom of choice in shaping our lives.

History, both sacred and profane, is full of the challenges and the responses of mankind. As individuals and nations have accepted or rejected opportunities for finer, nobler things, they have risen to the heights of more joyful and abundant living, or descended into the depths of failure, wretchedness, and oblivion.

Life in America has constantly been the answer to a challenge. From the days when our forefathers first landed upon the shores of this continent, fell upon their knees and thanked God for his guidance and protection, and then began pushing westward in the face of almost insurmountable difficulties and constant dangers that were threats to health and life itself, every step of the way has been challenged; but those challenges have been accepted and answered through the centuries by a courageous and determined people. The physical frontiers have been pushed steadily westward until the domain of this great nation stretches from the Atlantic to the Pacific.

There have likewise been political, social, economic, intellectual, moral, and spiritual

frontiers that had to be explored and charted. They, too, have offered challenges throughout the years of our history, offer them today, and will offer them tomorrow and in the years to come. We must continue to meet and accept these challenges.

CHRISTIAN EDUCATION A CHALLENGE

How shall we do it? How have we done it in the past? Christian education has been one of the methods adopted by North Carolina Baptists. It has not been pursued with enough vigor and strength of purpose; but it has proved its worth and its inestimable value. Christian education must be emphasized, encouraged, strengthened, and adequately supported from this day on.

One hundred and twelve years ago the North Carolina Baptist State Convention founded Wake Forest College and obtained from the State Legislature a charter. It was a bold and courageous step. At that time there were only a few thousand Baptists in the state. They were only loosely united in organization; the Convention itself was only four years old. They were divided in opinions regarding policy and methods of procedure. They had only a few educated leaders, and the task of uniting and developing a great denomination was not an easy one.

The prospects were not at all bright; but a vital, imperative need was recognized. A challenge was met and accepted. A Herculean task was undertaken. A program of Christian education was launched. With rare courage, faith, vision, and tenacity of purpose, Dr. Samuel Wait and others laid the foundations upon which a great institution has been built. There was vital necessity for an educated Baptist ministry. Therefore, the basic purpose for which Wake Forest College was founded was the education of young ministers and the propagation of the teachings of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Could any institution have a finer inception, or a nobler purpose?

Wake Forest College was conceived in a spirit of Truth; it was born of the determination to serve mankind in the name of God; and it was nurtured by and for the sake of love, both human and divine. The College was established upon the principles of righteousness and the eternal verities of God. It was dedicated to the task of providing for the mental development and enlightenment of young men in the light of spiritual truth—for the indispensable union of culture and spirituality in building stalwart men for the kingdom of God. Upon these truths and for these purposes the College was conceived and developed; and, under God, upon such principles the College shall abide and grow.

Wake Forest College has in large measure succeeded in the purpose for which it was founded. It has sunk its roots deep into the soil of basic truth, and projected its branches of influence far and wide. It has made indelible impressions of righteousness upon the hearts of thousands of young men. It has opened new vistas of truth, beauty, and nobility to them. It has hung upon the walls of their memories pictures of self-effacing love, noble sacrifice and divine purpose—living memories that have fortified, undergirded, and blessed their lives and efforts. It has sent them forth into the world braver, stronger, nobler men.

The College has served its constituency faithfully; it has promoted the general welfare of our Baptist denomination in many ways. It has exerted a powerful influence culturally, morally, and spiritually upon the life of our state, our nation, and the whole world. It has sent into almost every honorable walk of life men who have furnished Christian leadership and statesmanship.

Now, while our College was founded for a noble purpose and upon a strong and virile faith, it has had only meager financial means. Throughout more than a century it has grown and developed physically, but always with *growing pains*, never able to escape the handicaps imposed by limited financial means. It has been an uphill fight all the way, with opportunities for

service always exceeding the capacity for service. Today the opportunities for service are greater than ever before. The needs for Christian education are more imperative than ever before. But the capacity for service is exceedingly small and limited. Another challenge therefore confronts us. What shall we do with it?

CHRISTIAN DEMOCRACY OR TOTALITARIANISM

We are today confronted with the problems of a different world. The war of military might is ended. Devastating and destructive as it was, perhaps it was only a battle in the rebellion that engulfs the world. There is apparently organized rebellion against God and moral law, against the Christian conception of Jesus Christ as God and Saviour, against old and established principles of truth, against the established order of many things. There is no peace. The conflict continues in unabated fury. It is being fought in the minds and hearts and souls of men. It is a war of ideas, of ideologies, of philosophies and concepts of life in the relationships of man to his fellowman and to God. We are in the midst of a revolution—social, political, economic and moral in nature—that is undermining and rocking the very foundations of civilization and organized society.

The major issue is secularism as opposed to Christian culture. In every phase of the revolution secularism plays an important part. In fact, it is the motivating factor. It has enlisted in its ranks materialism and agnosticism, and many other "isms" of equally offensive character.

Politically, all over the world, two opposing ideologies of government are in death grips. They are the Totalitarian State and Christian Democracy. I say "Christian" democracy, because genuine democratic government is founded upon the principles of Christianity and made possible only by those principles. One of the fundamental principles of democracy is the inherent value of the individual as an immortal soul created in the spiritual image of God and having certain inalienable rights. The totalitarian state,—and they are all basically the same whether called by the name of Fascism, Nazism, or Communism,—rejects that principle. Karl Marx, an early exponent of totalitarianism, said, "That each man has a value as a sovereign being is an illusion, a dream and a postulate of Christianity which affirms that every man has a soul." In the totalitarian state, the individual is lost in collectivity. He is absorbed and made a part of the mass. He has no other value. That is in striking contrast with and in direct opposition to the teachings of the One who taught that an individual is of so much value that God,

the Father, numbers the hairs of his head and considers his every need.

It is disconcerting, alarming, even terrifying, to observe the cordial reception that is being accorded the ideas of the totalitarian state by many of the people in our own country. The drift in that direction is apparent even to the casual observer who understands the trends. The tragedy of it is that so many do not observe and do not understand. Thoughtful men have for a long time realized that a democratic form of government can survive only where the people exercise self-control, restraint, and the other Christian virtues. Long ago William Penn said that men will be governed either by God or by tyrants and dictators. There are many today who feel that the future government of America will be either some form of totalitarianism or a Christian democracy. Which shall it be?

In the field of morality, we observe similar rebellion and the disastrous effects of revolutionary activity. Society seems to have lost much of its self-respect and sense of honor. The laws and customs of morality and common decency are too often branded as hindrances to the full enjoyment of life, and as useless and deterring luggage that should have been jettisoned long ago.

In the field of religion, devastating and destructive blows have been struck. Indeed, we have become almost a faithless generation. Too many concessions have been made

to the self-styled intelligentsia of our day. Too many contradictions of the plain teachings of the inspired Word of God have been left unchallenged. Too many have been allowed to cover their lack of faith, or loss of faith, with the deceptive cloak of social utility. The Godship of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, has not been proclaimed with sufficient wisdom, faith and boldness to drown out the voice of those who have sought to rob Him of his Godship and reduce Him to the stature of a mere man.

The field of education has been converted into another battleground of the revolutionists. The tendency has been to dissect the very heart and soul from man, to make of man a clever animal, and to discredit or destroy the finest and noblest impulses, hopes, and ideals of life.

A system of education that disregards spiritual truths and neglects spiritual training, and thus recognizes only tangible facts and emphasizes only biological and material considerations, is worse than no education at all.

As John Erskine says: "Where morality —that is, personal obligation and responsibility—is not taught from the home up, the educational system first becomes an expensive folly, then an organized racket."

A distinguished contemporary has recently indicted the American system of education in these words: "The prevailing educa-

tion is destined, if it continues, to destroy the Western civilization, and in fact, is destroying it . . . The plain fact is that the graduates of the modern school are actors in the catastrophe which has befallen our civilization . . . By separating education from the classical, religious tradition the school cannot train the pupil to look upon himself as an inviolable person because he is made in the image of God. These very words, though they now sound archaic, are the noblest words in our language."

Perhaps the situation in the field of education is only slightly worse than in our homes that have to a great extent ceased to function according to Christian principles. In almost every field of life we observe the blighting influence of secularism. It glorifies the easy way of life, proclaiming it permissible to take by whatever means available that which is desired, rather than to toil and sweat in the processes of making and building. It removes individual and personal responsibilities and rejects the idea of discipline, whether wisely self-imposed or divinely superimposed.

These deplorable conditions must be changed. There must be a spiritual awakening. What we have done in the past is not enough. The challenge must be met today. Jeremiah's question of old, "Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by?" must

be given this personal application today: "Is it nothing to us, all us Christians that pass by?"

DO WE WANT CHRISTIAN CULTURE?

In the thought of the world's greatest educator, the Man of Galilee, I ask: Do we *want* to be made whole? Do we *want* Christian culture? Do we *want* it enough to exercise the faith, the courage, and the sacrificial effort that will give it to us. At the Pool of Bethesda Jesus asked the crippled man, "Wilt thou be made whole?" "Do you *want* to be made whole?" It was a soul-searching question. That man met the test.

The rich young ruler inquired of the Great Teacher what he should do to inherit eternal life, but went away sorrowfully when instructed by the Master. He did not really *want* eternal life.

Most of the Israelites who came out of Egypt under the leadership of Moses did not really *want* to enter the land flowing with milk and honey. They preferred the flesh pots of Egypt, and they died in the wilderness.

If we really *want* Christian culture, if we are willing to recognize our stewardship, we are abundantly able to meet the challenge that confronts us today.

We are no longer an organization of a few thousand people. We are more than 600 thousand souls. We are a strong people, and it is only necessary for us to exercise the powers and abilities that are ours. We must follow through with the program that was initiated more than a century ago by Samuel Wait, Thomas Meredith, and others. We must keep the faith with them and with those who in succeeding years have enlarged our program of Christian education and founded and supported Meredith College, Mars Hill, Campbell, Gardner-Webb, Wingate, and Chowan. We must make all of our colleges as fine in their fields as can be found anywhere.

But today our interest centers in just one of our schools. What shall we do with Wake Forest College? Will we now have the vision and the courage to match the loyalty and sacrificial efforts of Samuel Wait and others? "There remaineth very much land to be possessed." Those words were spoken by the God of the Universe to a grand old warrior who was about to stack his arms forever. Joshua had lived a wonderful life. He had seen much of conquest. Now he was nearing the end of his journey, and God was talking to him. How his heart must have thrilled! Could it be that God is saying to us: "You have made a good start; you have wrought well in the past, but there are many conquests

that lie ahead. There remaineth very much land to be possessed."

The members of the Reynolds family have been noble, generous, and considerate in their fine offer. They have not said that they want to buy, or in any respect take away from us, our fine college. On the other hand, they have said that they want us to keep it, to love and cherish it, and to permit them to help us make it a great institution. They could have built the physical plant and invited us to move in, but we could not have accepted it. They could have given it to us, but it would not have been ours. Our hearts would not have been in it. "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also," is the authoritative statement of Jesus. We would have been forced to say with David, a man after God's own heart, "neither will I offer . . . unto the Lord . . . that which doth cost me nothing."

The members of the Reynolds family were too wise, too generous, too considerate to do that. They want our hearts to be in Wake Forest College. They want it to be a living, breathing, vital part of us. They want it to continue as a Baptist denominational college, serving the youth of our state and nation. They want the College to remain our institution, where free men can search out and proclaim God's truth and worship God in spirit and in truth.

They want only to be co-laborers in a great and worthwhile task.

The only change that they have requested is that the College be moved to Winston-Salem. It is easy to understand how they could want the cultural influence of the College in their native city. That requirement, of course, stirs deep emotions for those of us who know and love it in its present setting. We are moved with sadness when we think of a change being made. But we realize that deep in our hearts we want to do what is best for the College. We want it to serve humanity in the place where it can render the finest and best service. Our Baptist Hospital is in Winston-Salem. Our Medical School is already there and rendering a fine service, thanks to the generosity of Gordon and Bowman Gray and their mother. Others who will gladly respond to the opportunity for service are there.

No other changes have been requested. The members of the Reynolds family want the denomination to continue its support of our College. They want the Enlargement Program to continue. They want to help us make a dream come true. They have challenged us to greater efforts.

By accepting and meeting the challenge, we shall be able to do three things which I mention briefly:

First: We shall be able to provide a physical plant for Wake Forest College that

will be a credit and a source of pride to the Baptist denomination of North Carolina and to our generous friends in Winston-Salem. It must be modern and adequate for our needs and lend itself readily to expansion. But buildings alone do not make a great institution. It must have a heart, a soul. It must, therefore, be adequately staffed by a faculty composed of men and women of fine personality, scholarship, and consecration. The faculty must be large enough and cared for well enough in opportunity for growth and otherwise, that our boys and girls will have the finest possible leadership. It must be under the direction of those who have initiative, vision, courage, and faith. It must offer a program of education that equips men and women to live full, wholesome, happy lives, because they are in harmony with eternal truths and because their hearts beat in unison with the great heart of God. We must send out into the world men and women trained for leadership in the pulpit, in the pew, in law, medicine, the class room, business, and all other walks of life.

Second: It will arouse us to a fuller appreciation of our stewardship. It will strengthen and undergird the Cooperative Program. Until a person gives to the full extent of his ability of time, talents, and money, the more he gives, the more he *will* give. It is a leavening process. Furthermore, if our Cooperative Program is based

on hope and faith, it also definitely depends upon trained leadership. Let us remember that our missionaries and our leaders at home must come from our Christian colleges.

Third: It will afford an excellent opportunity for us to demonstrate to the world our faith in ourselves, our faith in our fellowman, and, above all else, our faith in our God. The whole state is watching us. Many throughout our nation are watching us as we have never been watched before. It will enable us to demonstrate that good common sense, determination, and a willingness to work and toil in *faith* constitute an unbeatable combination.

When God called Moses to lead the Israelites out of Egyptian bondage, that great leader hesitated, faltered, and protested that he was unable to undertake and accomplish so great a task. The Lord said unto him, "Certainly, I will be with thee." If today we can feel the assurance that God is saying unto us, "Certainly, I will be with thee," then a glorious and victorious future shall be ours.